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The Family, Cradle of Law

THE CRISIS OF OUR TIME is not so much a crisis in intergovernmental relations involving destruction by hydrogen bombs as it is a crisis in human relations involving disintegration in men's minds.

Society is assailed by all sorts of ideological propaganda, and seems to have lost its grip on the fundamentals of human life. In the same way, the bases of Roman imperial society had crumbled for half a century before those living under it realized the fact.

Today's young people have lived their lives from infancy in a world in turmoil. Uncertainties crowd upon them; they see adults everywhere bent upon violence and destruction.

This is not the first such period. People who lived in the time of King Arthur expected the world to end in the year one thousand, and the reaction which followed its reprieve led to a burst of lawlessness and brutality which sickened Europe for centuries. Today's reprieve from the nuclear war which seemed so imminent a few years ago is being followed by a similar reaction.

What we call civilization has moved so fast that the structure and instincts of man have not kept up. As well as the ideological battles raging in the political world men and women and boys and girls must still face the profoundly individual issues of life and the vital inter-personal relations of parent and child.

The most intelligent people are at a loss about what to think regarding the many questions hammering at us, and the time has come to look at the needs of parents and children steadily, clearly, and without pink glasses.

That is why Their Excellencies the Governor General and Madame Vanier convened the Canadian Conference on the Family.

The family is the single most important influence upon the life and future of the child. It is required to fulfil the definition given by St. Augustine: a group of people united by agreement as to the things they love. In such a society children learn that certain things are right and others are wrong, they grow from

stage to stage of confidence, skill, affection, understanding and responsibility. They build character.

Changing times

In addition to the stresses caused by war's alternating threats and armistices, there are other forces at work. The family has been subjected to violent assaults and shocks from revolutionary transformations in material living and psychological conditions. Children live at the wave front of past culture and are the plastic receivers of the culture of the future.

Ways of behaviour change in the face of changed conditions. People feel differently and act differently toward one another from generation to generation. Parents and children are not looking through the same eyes. The children confront problems of choice and action different in kind and importance from those they watched their parents solve.

If both parents and children realize these facts, then parents will be more tolerant of the vagaries of their children, and children will be more understanding of their elders. It is not necessary that they should always agree in mood, opinion, and impulse, but it is necessary that they should get together so as to live effectively, each on his own level.

It is a hard doctrine for many parents when they are asked to believe that their children cannot be brought up as they were brought up. With intimations of mortality rustling in their ears, they are likely to be impatient of changes from the old ways.

Some ideas and attitudes favoured in the first half of the century are not expansive enough for the second half. Upon analysis, however, it will be seen that most of the changes involve differences in expression and not in principles. We must learn how to use modernity without cutting adrift from the basic virtues which are the key to our humanity.

The democracy of which we are so proud poses problems in itself. Once upon a time democracy was only a political idea: today we have democracy in industry, in community life, and in the home. We are

torn between the need for conformity and the need for individuality. As a consequence, we face risk and uncertainty, surprise and disappointment. If democracy is worth while, then we must accept these conflicts. As Kaspar Naegele, Professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia said at the Lake Couchiching Conference in 1963: "Perfect ordering would surely spell death."

Perhaps democracy is being forced upon children when they are too young. To saddle a child or adolescent with freedom beyond his demonstrated capability of judgment is not fair, even though it be done under some high-sounding name. The privilege of developing children little by little up to the point where they can cope with the bewildering world into which they have been launched is the reward and crown of parenthood.

It is popular to blame influences outside the home when a boy goes wrong, or to rail against television, radio, newspapers and magazines. But all these enter as a second influence, and if the first — the ingraining of a sense of decency by parents — has been effectively done then all these lose their power to debase.

Trends towards evil are not so much carried in the germ plasm as they are developed by the culture that surrounds us in early years. This demands something better than the movies, the pulp magazines, the television dramas, and the fumbling experiences of companions. As a chief of police in Texas put it: "We are careful to see that the silverware and glasses are sterilized, but we let their minds feed on garbage."

Today's children are caught, too, in the whirlpool of status seeking. While fathers drive stately cars and mothers offer their homes to admiring inspection, they lose their sons and daughters. Children learn to judge by the symbols people display and not by people's individual worth.

The outcome is broken homes, not necessarily by absence of one of the parents but by breakdown of the functions of the family. It is generally accepted that a complete group, consisting of father, mother, and children living in close harmony, is essential to the development of a balanced and socially adjusted personality. Only a few threads need to be broken in order to cause trouble. Tensions that snap these threads include conflict over the pattern of child education, disagreement over duties, restrictions and behaviour, and, very important, failure of the parents to keep up with the changing times.

Revolt of youth

It is normal for a person to demand some independence in middle adolescence.

No one has ever been able to change from one kind of life to one totally different without marked unrest. Adolescents have progressed from the state of "Please help me" to "I can take care of myself". They need, now, to learn the third, the responsible, stage: "Please let me help you."

The period of self-assertion is a phase of family life with which the good parent must cope without allowing any open breaks in family solidarity to occur. Youth is likely to overrate liberty, and to strike out in all directions to assert it. Parents are charged with the responsibility to teach the undoubted truth that there is no principle more widely seen in all nature, and more sternly enforced, from the scurrying ant on its hill to the star cities in space, than this: "Not liberty, but law, prevails."

The words "freedom" and "rights" have a magic sound in the ears of young people, who may translate them into self-indulgence and self-gratification. The time to start putting them into focus is before the impact of dawning personality has created habits in the children which will have to be vanquished some day by self-discipline or by the discipline of the law.

It is important for parents to seek and to find the cause of deviation in children. The most obstreperous girl or boy may be merely lonely and baffled. The Angry Young Man may be only giving vent to suppressed feelings of frustration. Something in his nature has failed to find a disciplined outlet. In his boredom, and impelled by youth's restless urge to action, he seeks to destroy. A Nihilist teacher, Michael Bakunin, said destruction is also creation: more properly, it is a substitute for creation.

One remedy to be applied while more permanent ways of adjustment are being sought is to give young people constructive things to do. In an age of space exploration, ping-pong is not enough to fill all a child's mind. We need to give adolescents room to move around and exercise not only their bodies but their minds. If what we do provide is not being used it is because our organization and our inspiration are defective.

Delinquency

The beginning of delinquency is not the first time a boy or a girl is caught by the police in an illegal act. It started long before that, in family toleration of disobedience, insolence and irreverence. Dr. David Abrahamsen, a Norwegian psychiatrist, says baldly in his book *Who are the Guilty?* "In general we may say that the causes of a child's delinquent behaviour may be traced to his parents."

A delinquent is one who is not able to make the necessary adjustments to fit him to his environment. He feels no need at all to live up to the expectations of others.

But he reflects in some measure the world around him: a society in which the emphasis is on material things and on speed, on violence and the idea drilled into us by false advertising that we should get what we want now and settle, if any settlement is insisted on, at a later date.

Delinquency is not something solely for backward or impoverished youths. It is indulged in equally by

bright, high IQ, children of the well-to-do. Some garden suburbs are just as much plagued by destructive mischief as are big cities.

The basic ill is not something that can be put right by a flick of a philanthropic wrist that sets up societies and agencies. It lies at the heart of our accepted values. It is condoned by what Judge Redmond Roche, Court of Sessions, addressing a convention of police chiefs in Montreal, referred to as "the apathy and moral decay of the population". Chief Justice James C. McRuer, of the Ontario Supreme Court, said in Toronto that violent juvenile crimes do not reflect on the great body of young people in Ontario, "but they do reflect on the manner in which the adult population is discharging its responsibility". Hugh Christie, warden of Canada's largest prison, said five years ago in an address to a Management Association that his institution is filled with spoiled children.

Commissioner George B. McClellan of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police put it this way when addressing the Empire Club in Toronto: "It is not juvenile delinquency I want to speak about — it is parental delinquency — because, in my humble opinion, the group which is creating the troubles I have referred to is, for the most part, a product of irresponsible homes and irresponsible parents. I think the trouble begins in the home, and ultimately it will have to be corrected in the home."

Very often, said the Commissioner, "I have heard the cry of an anguished or bewildered parent, 'How did my child get to be this way?' Well, the seed for good or evil is in all of us, and the fruit of it depends on its cultivation."

Obviously these experienced speakers believe that it is better to prevent the problem of delinquency from arising rather than to invoke the law to cure its effects.

Rules for raising misfits

Instead of giving the usual catalogue of virtues to be cultivated, Commissioner McClellan sharpened his lesson by listing ten effective methods to use so that a child will become an antisocial misfit:

(1) Do not have any rules for child behaviour or obedience in the home. This will ensure that the child has no clear concept of right or wrong.

(2) If you have any rules, enforce them intermittently. Ignore them when you are in good humour and knock the kid silly if he breaks the rules when you are tired and out of sorts. This will confuse him thoroughly. He won't know what is expected of him and will eventually resent all discipline.

(3) Air your domestic disputes right out in front of the children, preferably with a little name-calling. This will ensure that he has no respect for either of his parents.

(4) Never give a child any chores or regular duties around the home. This will convince him

that you and the world owe him a living, without effort on his part.

(5) If he is disciplined at school, always go to the school and tear a strip off the teacher or the principal in front of the child. This will create an excellent contempt for authority at any level.

(6) Later, when he has trouble with the police, which is most likely, bawl out the officer, or, better still, the Chief, being always sure to refer to the 'dumb cop'. This procedure will earn the child a diploma in contempt for authority.

(7) When you are out driving with the family, exceed the local speed limit, but slow down when you see a police car. Be sure to speed up as soon as the police car is out of sight. This will show the child that the law is to be observed only if there is any danger of being caught.

(8) If you are stopped by the police for speeding, and you are speeding, always deny flatly that you were exceeding the speed limit. Make a big fuss over it. Your child will then know that cheating and lying are acceptable procedures.

(9) If you have managed to chisel a few dollars on your income tax, be sure and tell the family at the dinner table that night how smart you are. This should convince the youngsters that stealing is all right if you can get away with it.

(10) Never check up on where your youngsters are in the evening. Never mind what time they get home. Never, never, try to learn anything about their friends. This one is almost sure fire.

These suggestions of the wrong way to raise children to be decent citizens were made by the man who, of all others in Canada, because he is head of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, knows most about what enters into the making of law-breakers.

A positive approach

Parents who wish to help their children toward a happy, decent life need not carry their problem into space for solution. They need only strive to reach their ideal through purifying and strengthening the old institutions.

Young people need rules to guide them and standards by which to judge themselves. The home takes its rightful and eminent place in preparing children for life when basic principles are quietly and firmly announced and lived up to. The final test is not how amenable young people are to compulsion of the law, but how far they can be trusted to obey self-imposed law.

The time has come to cease emphasizing the gadgets of everyday living, and to set over against them the imperishable qualities of honesty, integrity, unselfishness and respect for law.

A family is a project in group living in which the

thing to do and the thing not to do are absorbed through precept, example and practice. Children are born the most helpless and unwitting of animals, the least armed with ready instincts to fit them for survival, the slowest to develop their potentialities of autonomy and at the same time the most receptive, the most imitative, the most educable, the most richly endowed.

To the child, with his short perspective, life is all foreground, composed of the persons who feed, carry, coddle, amuse, slap or abandon him. These people are responsible not only for immediate care, but for all the years of his life, because they build his personality at the same time as they nourish and protect his body. In a good family the child grows up in an atmosphere of mutual respect and learns to respect others; he participates in wholesome, unselfish, democratic practices; and in the nature of things he will project all these into his wider adult life.

Discipline

Discipline in the home is not at all on a par with the "snap-to-it-and-obey-orders" sort of discipline learned in an army. It goes back to the origin of the word: that which was studied by the disciple of any teacher was a discipline.

Does your child do a brave or noble or unselfish act? Praise him for it. Was it also an unwise act? Reprimand him for it. When a Spartan performed heroically in a battle, the chief magistrates gave him a garland, but as soon as they had done so they fined him a thousand drachmas for going out to battle without his armour.

The child does not want a do-as-you-please, permissive, world. It makes him confused and unhappy. He wants a stable, reliable, wall around him, defining his world, giving him a large free area but telling him exactly how far he can go.

This wall can be built of such things as respect for others' property and rights, respect for elders, observance of the conventions which lubricate social life. If children are not taught these things they are being handicapped, and, says R. P. Smith in one of his books: "the reason these kids are getting into trouble with cops is because cops are the first people they meet who say, and mean it, 'You can't do that'."

There is no need, in teaching discipline or respect for the law, to plant morbid guilt feelings in the young mind. Laws are not enacted to make any particular person unhappy, but to contrive rather that everyone may have the opportunity to be happy without interference.

The law of Canada is a control of ourselves through each other. It tells the free man how far his absolute freedom extends and what his enforceable duties are. It operates in the spirit of honour, good faith and equitable firmness. Its precepts are, as stated by the Emperor Justinian in the year 533: to live honourably, not to injure another, to render to every man his due.

Observance of the precepts of the law arises out of developing affection for the good. Goodness is not simply an absence of wrongdoing, but a love of the things that are honest and of good repute.

Some parents may feel baffled and incompetent when they start to make plans for shouldering this responsibility. They should have no hesitation in calling upon qualified outside advisers. It is not a sign of weakness to secure professional help when facing a new situation that is of so momentous importance to the welfare and happiness of their children and so vitally needful to their own peace of mind. The church, the school, and the social agencies will gladly give their experienced help to any parent who is timid, anxious and baffled.

This is not to advocate institutionalism, which cannot ever replace the family as the cradle of law. As Marya Mannes says in her very modern survey of life in the United States, the children must have "the soft wide lap, the kind hands, the tender face" of mother or grandmother. Parents who have a healthy respect for themselves, think sensibly about themselves, and understand themselves, can give their children the mature emotional guidance which they need to grow up into mature adults, but they may need help with the way they go about it.

It goes without saying that parents who seek respect for their precepts must, as the principle of the law of equity puts it, "come with clean hands." Children can detect insincerity a thousand light years away. They will learn best from parents who have shown by their example that they can accept responsibility for leading their own lives effectively.

As for the children's responsibility, the ancient commandment still thunders from Sinai: "Honour your father and your mother."

Moving toward the light

People may make massive compilations of facts, statistics and opinions, and assemble them in impressive arrays of arguments, but in the end they produce only a few humble truths.

In the transmission of ideals and of culture, in the building of character and the qualities needed in this changing world, the family of today must be the burden bearer and the path breaker. It recognizes children as being more important than things, ideas as more precious than gadgets, and personal worth the touchstone by which all other values are tested.

With every generation the world has a new chance to strengthen these values. Parents of today should give their children some memories to guide them, memories of family life in which justice was upheld, affection unstintingly given, discipline tenderly explained and fine example habitually displayed. Thereby they move the sleeping images of good things inherent in their children toward the light.